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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a synopsis of the findings of a national survey of headteachers conducted in 1999 by means of a self-completion postal questionnaire. The survey sought to establish the perceptions of English headteachers with regard to their state of readiness on taking up the role. Where respondents reported themselves as well prepared or extremely well prepared for aspects of their role, they were asked to attribute their perceived state of readiness to training, experience, or a combination of the two. In addition, respondents were asked to complete open-ended questions that asked them to identify activities and support that would help the induction of newly appointed headteachers working in the special-education sector. Analysis of all responses reveals that the majority of headteachers (57 percent) perceived themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared. The influence of training was deemed to be minimal by respondents in all categories. Most surprising was that headteachers did not perceive themselves to be well prepared in applying law to specific situations. (Contains 7 references.) (DFR)

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The effects of pre-service training and experience on preparation for the principalship in England.

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Background Information

The position of school principal in England (and other parts of the UK) differs both in name and role expectation from similar positions in most other countries. Firstly, the position is referred to as Headteacher, a title that carries with it an extensive history of professional independence. Secondly, the position is unique in the level of responsibility allocated to the position by legislation.

Traditionally headteachers in England have been considered to be autonomous autocrats, a status that grew from the respect accorded to their predecessors in independent schools in Victorian times. That level of respect is still largely maintained despite a radical shift in central government policy, accompanied by legislation, over the last 25 years which has dramatically raised the levels of accountability for those running schools in the maintained sector. The headteacher is considered to be the pivotal figure in the state education system, one whose leadership qualities largely influence and determine the effectiveness of the school.

In addition headteachers in England are the only official identified in the state education system as being individually responsible for the administration and management of the school. Under the terms of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act, 1991, the headteacher carries specific responsibility for the internal organisation, management and control of the school. All other officials responsible for decision making are either lay members of the public (serving on the governing bodies required for each school) or are employees of the local education authority (LEA – the near equivalent of School Districts in the US) and are thus only vicariously liable for actions and decisions taken at the site level.

The net result of these two influences is to create a position equated in the public and government perception with notions of 'omnicompetence' (Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham, 1997: 118) whereby headteachers are perceived as:

> the skilled classroom practitioner plus curriculum leader, plus technical expert, plus all the manifestations associated with being the figurehead and with being 'in control' of the whole mechanism [school] all the time.

The role of headteacher has changed considerably over the last 12 years with the introduction of a system of site based management through the 1988 Education Reform Act that by now requires administration of virtually the entire budget (including all staff costs) at the school level. With most of the mandatory school governing bodies operating in a supportive, rather than controlling, mode the headteacher is effectively the chief executive of a self-managing organisation (albeit within a curricular framework that is nationally determined).

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a synopsis of the findings of a national survey of headteachers conducted during 1999 by means of a self-completion postal questionnaire. The survey sought to establish the perceptions of English headteachers with regard to their state of readiness on taking up the role. Where respondents reported themselves as well prepared or extremely well prepared for aspects of their role they were asked to attribute their perceived state of readiness to training, experience, or a combination of the two. In addition respondents were asked to complete open-ended questions which asked them to identify activities and support which would help the induction of newly appointed headteachers working in the special education sector.

A stratified random sample of 10 per cent of all serving headteachers in England was established, totalling 2285 potential respondents in all. Completed returns were received from 1405 headteachers, an overall response rate of 62 per cent. Written and telephone replies from a further number of potential respondents (99) accounts for 66 per cent of the total sample.

The demographics of the study largely matched the profile of the headteacher workforce, where such statistics were available, with the single exception of the ratio of women to men. There was a greater proportion of women respondents (54 per cent) in the survey than within the entire headteacher population (49.5 per cent: 1997 figures – Department for Education and Employment, 1998: 28-29). Given the size of

the sample responses (of those indicating gender, Women: n = 748; Men = 626), however, the results are still considered to be generalisable. There are no figures available to compare the ethnicity of the sample with that of the entire headteacher population. 99 per cent of the sample reported themselves as 'White' or 'Irish', with only a small proportion (n = 18) of respondents indicating they were of a different ethnicity. Of these respondents there were four Black African, two Black Caribbean, one Black Other, four Indian, two Pakistani, one Bangladesh and one Chinese. In addition to these nationally recognised classifications two reported themselves as 'Mixed Race European' and one as 'Pomeranian'. The age range was from 28 to 63 years with a normal curve of distribution from the sample. Length of service ranged from three respondents in their first year of service to one who had completed 30 years in post.

The timing of the survey aimed to precede the anticipated effects of a national programme of principal certification being introduced in England, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). At the time the survey closed only 403 candidates (just under 2 per cent of the population of headteachers) had qualified for the NPQH since its introduction in 1997 (through voluntary participation in the trials, pilot and initial cohorts of the programme). The total of respondents to this survey included 54 (just under 4 per cent), however, who had been participants on the new qualification, although there was no clarity as to whether they had achieved the qualification before or after they had become a headteacher (an option at the time). The government has now made provision for the NPQH to become mandatory by 2002. This survey provides the last set of data, therefore, where the bulk of beginning headteachers have no formal programme of preparation for the role.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire was in four parts, with Part 1 focusing on training and experience and Part 4 seeking to discover demographic details including ethnicity, gender, age and type of school. The major purpose of the questionnaire was contained in Part 2 which provided a range of 28 questions examining the perceptions of serving headteachers as to their level of preparation for the headship. Answers were offered on a four point scale with a score of 3 equalling 'well-prepared' and a core of 4 equalling 'extremely well prepared'. Those headteachers who felt well prepared or

extremely well prepared for the post on entry were then asked to complete an associated question as whether they attributed their perceived degree of preparation to training, experience or some combination of both. This time they used a five point scale with a score of 1 equalling 'training only', a score of 2 equalling 'mostly training', a score of 3 reporting an 'equal training and experience', a score of 4 equalling 'mostly experience' and a score of 5 equalling 'experience only'. Part 3 of the questionnaire allowed the respondents to write short answers where they gave suggestions for improving the preparation and induction of new headteachers.

Work began on the design of the questionnaire in January, 1998. The basic design was based on the work conducted previously by the research team from the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations from the University of Texas at El Paso (Daresh, Dunlap, Gantner, & Hvizdak, 1998). The team had applied the Delphi technique (Robson, 1993: 27) to solicit information about effective principal preparation from 30 practising principals in the El Paso area identified by peers, supervisors, and university colleagues as effective leaders.

The Delphi technique included the following steps. First, the research team mailed the sample an initial survey inviting them to respond to the question:

> What curriculum components do you think should be included in an effective principal preparation program?

The research team then compiled the replies and mailed respondents the results, asking them to add, delete, combine, or otherwise clarify the list as needed. The team then revised the list of responses following suggestions made by the principals and again sent copies to participants for their approval. This process was repeated twice, at which point participants recommended no further revisions. The finalised list included 28 items.

The team then grouped the 28 items into three categories which they entitled:

(a) Development of Skills;
(b) Formation of Attitudes and Values;
(c) Increase of Knowledge.

These 28 items organised in three categories were the basis for the questionnaire entitled *Principal Preparation Program Survey*.

In adapting the *Principal Preparation Program Survey* for this study, the first step was to consider the appropriateness of the original instrument for addressing both the purpose of this study and its intended audience. The 28 items identified by the principals in the original study were compared to the current version of the National Standards for headteachers (Teacher Training Agency, 1998). The researchers found each of the 28 items to be reflected in the standards identified by the TTA. Consequently, the curriculum components from the *Principal Preparation Program Survey*, revised to reflect cultural and linguistic differences, became the base for a new questionnaire exploring the role of prior training and experience on preparation for the headship.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a convenience sample of 30 headteachers drawn from schools within the immediate region. A total of 19 completed responses were received in late June, early July, 1998. These respondents were then asked to complete a second version of the same questionnaire some six weeks after submitting the first response. These returns were checked against each other in order to reveal consistency of answer which was deemed to be a measure of reliability.

Expert guidance on the validity of the questions was sought from a further cohort of serving headteachers and from other professional colleagues familiar with the headship. An opportunity group of serving headteachers was established from volunteers who were members of the MBA in Educational Leadership at the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside. Members of the group each completed one of the draft questionnaires in September, 1998 and were subsequently interviewed the next day by members of the research team. Face to face interviews were conducted on an individual basis, with the interviews tape recorded. Contemporaneous interview notes were made, with the tapes being used later to confirm or clarify responses. Further guidance was sought from a recently retired headteacher (with over 20 years experience as a head) and two serving headteachers (of two and five years experience, respectively), by means of a series of meetings and discussions held over a two month period between September and November, 1998.

In all there were 18 working versions of the questionnaire tested, discussed and trialled before the printing and distribution of the final version in February, 1999.

FINDINGS

Analysis of all responses reveals that the majority of headteachers (57 per cent) perceived themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared in the skills element of their role defined by the questionnaire, with 74 per cent also feeling similarly prepared in the formation of their values and attitudes and 64 per cent perceiving themselves to have had the levels of knowledge and understanding necessary for the post. Of those who felt themselves either well prepared or extremely well prepared in the development of skills, 53 per cent attributed this mostly or entirely to experience rather than training, with 65 per cent of respondents similarly identifying experience as the key factor in the formation of attitudes and values. It was only in the last category, the increase of knowledge, that fewer then half the respondents (34 per cent) indicated that something other than experience was the major factor in their preparation for the role. The major contributor in this instance was a mixture of training and experience, with 54 per cent of respondents making this choice.

The influence of training was deemed to be minimal by respondents in all categories, with just seven per cent indicating that mostly training or training only had been the principal factor in the development of the skills identified in this survey. Just two per cent of respondents indicated that training was mostly responsible for the formation of their attitudes and values, with fewer than one per cent (n = 9) attributing this element of their preparation entirely to training. The highest response rate in the attribution of training as the key factor in their preparation was with the increase of knowledge where 12 per cent of respondents felt that training was either mostly or wholly responsible for their perceived state of readiness for the role.

The development of skills

A majority of respondents felt either well or extremely well prepared in 11 of the 18 skills identified for this survey. The highest ranked individual skill was the maintenance of effective school discipline with 90 per cent of respondents indicating

themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared for this aspect of the role in their first year if headship. Three other skills were identified by over three quarters of respondents as ones for which they felt a more than adequately prepared:

- working effectively with adults (82 per cent);
- using effective communication techniques (78 per cent), and;
- forming and working with teams (77 per cent)

In the remaining seven skills where the majority of respondents felt themselves to be more than adequately prepared, all scores were in the third quartile (see Table 1, below)

The least prepared aspect appears to be in the application of law to specific situations with only 19 per cent of respondents scoring this as a 3 or 4 on the rating scale. There were three other areas where under a third of respondents felt confident in their level of skills :

- working with the under performing teacher (24 per cent);
- using information technology and other tools in the management process (29 per cent);
- using student performance data to plan curriculum (30 per cent)

The three remaining aspects of skill in which fewer than half of respondents perceived themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared were:

- assuming responsibility for school management (36 per cent);
- planning for future needs and growth (44 per cent), and;
- organising school administration (46 per cent).

Table 1- Development of Skills

Question	%age	Attributable to (%): Training only	Mostly training	Equal	Mostly exprnce	Exprnce only
A1: Putting vision into words *(n = 797 1405)*	57	1	6	41	41	10
A2: Ensuring that all people with an interest in the school are involved in the school mission *(n = 801 1405)*	57	1	6	41	42	10
A3: Building community/parental involvement (n = 1020/1405)	73	0	1	25	51	23
A4: Working effectively with adults *(n = 1149 1405)*	82	0	1	27	52	20
A5: Working with the under performing teacher (n = 344/1405)	24	2	8	34	39	18
A6: Identifying children with special needs *(n = 1020 1405)*	73	1	8	54	25	12
A7: Using student performance data to plan curriculum *(n = 419 1405)*	30	0	11	51	29	9
A8: Maintaining effective school discipline *(n = 1261 1405)*	90	0	1	28	41	29
A9: Resolving conflict/handling confrontation *(n = 928 1405)*	66	0	2	32	43	23
A10: Using effective communication techniques*(n = 1089 1405)*	78	0	3	39	40	18
A11: Conducting a meeting (n = 1016/1405)	72	1	4	34	37	24
A12: Forming and working with teams *(n = 1085 1405)*	77	0	3	37	41	19
A13: Applying educational law to specific situations *(n = 256 1405)*	19	5	21	50	18	6
A14: Planning for future needs and growth (n = 628/1405)	44	1	8	53	31	6
A15: Assuming responsibility for school management (n = 506/1405)	36	3	12	46	26	13
A16: Organising school administration *(n = 660 1405)*	46	1	5	42	35	17
A17: Constructing timetables *(n = 952 1405)*	68	1	3	27	38	31
A18: Using information technology and other tools in the management process *(n = 406 1405)*	29	4	10	44	24	18
TOTAL	57	1	6	39	36	17

As indicated in the overview of the results at the start of this section on findings, few respondents attributed their perceived state of readiness to training. In only one skill, the one for which respondents felt least prepared, did more than a quarter of those who felt well prepared indicate training as being the key factor contributing to their

readiness. Only three other skills scored more than 10 per cent, with the overall figure established at seven per cent.

Formation of attitudes and values

The vast majority of respondents felt more than adequately prepared for this aspect of their role (see Table 2, below). Training seemed to play a minimal part in achieving this perceived state of readiness, with only two per cent of respondents indicating that training as being mostly responsible. Those willing to nominate training as being wholly responsible numbered fewer than 10 in total, less than 1 per cent.

Table 2 – Formation of Values and Attitudes

		Attributable to (%):				
Question	**%age**	**Training only**	**Mostly training**	**Equal**	**Mostly exprnce**	**Exprnce only**
B1: Behaving in ways consistent with your values, attitudes and beliefs *(n = 1188/1405)*	84	0	1	28	38	34
B2: Promoting ethical practices in the school *(n = 1129/1405)*	80	0	1	32	40	26
B3: Encouraging respect for life-long learning *(n = 893/1405)*	63	0	2	34	37	27
B4: Creating a community of learners (n = 929/1405)	66	0	3	38	37	22
TOTAL	74	0	2	33	38	27

Increase of knowledge

The majority of respondents felt themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared for the six aspects of knowledge identified in this survey, with all scores confined to the third quartile. Whilst training again seemed to play a minimal role in this perceived level of readiness (see Table 3, below), respondents did not indicate that experience was the main causal factor. A mixture of training and experience was the largest score for each aspect of knowledge increase.

Table 3 – Increase of Knowledge

Question	%age	Attributable to (%): Training only	Mostly training	Equal	Mostly exprnce	Exprnce only
Knowing and understanding:						
C1: ways in which reflective practice develops healthy organisations *(n = 738/1405)*	52	2	12	55	23	7
C2: the process of matching student learning styles with appropriate teaching methods *(n = 977/1405)*	60	1	7	56	25	11
C3: how the planning and selection of appropriate curriculum affects student learning *(n = 1038/1405)*	74	1	7	57	27	8
C4: how educational trends and issues influence organisational change *(n = 833/1405)*	59	3	14	54	22	6
C5: how values and attitudes affect the way people view educational issues *(n = 866/1405)*	62	1	7	43	35	13
C6: the basic principles which guide assessment and evaluation *(n = 919/1405)*	65	1	13	60	19	7
TOTAL	64	2	10	54	25	9

Findings from Part 3 of the questionnaire

The opportunity to respond to open ended questions was offered to respondents in Part 3 of the questionnaire. Three questions were asked:

1. What else do you think would help first-year headteachers to be more effective?
2. What level of support would be helpful during the first two years of headship?
3. What other comments would you like to make?

Over 95 per cent of respondents took the opportunity to answer one or more of these questions, creating a wealth of qualitative data that is still being analysed at the time of writing. Three clear issues have emerged (yet to be quantified), however, as recurrent themes:

- the need for a skilled mentor;
- the need for peer group support, and;
- the need for more focused training.

A fourth issue emerges when examining the responses of headteachers of primary [elementary] schools, the need to provide time for deputy headteachers to undertake focused development activities (most are currently class teachers on near full timetables).

The demand for mentor support was overwhelming. In this instance mentoring was seen as the opportunity to discuss school management issues with a colleague who had knowledge, appreciation and preferably experience of headship. The relationship was to be non-judgemental and to form a core part of individual development for the beginning headteacher. Such criteria ruled out personnel from LEA advisory/ inspection teams and from members of the headteacher's own staff or governing body.

There was considerable support for the establishment of local or regional groups of peers, preferably consisting of those who were new to headship although the contribution of longer serving headteachers and group facilitators was also called for.

The calls for focused training were plentiful, but the definition of the content of such programmes was so varied that little more has emerged from this data as yet that can inform future practice.

DISCUSSION

The most surprising finding is that headteachers did not perceive themselves to be well prepared in applying law to specific situations. All other skills where less than a third of respondents felt less than well prepared can, arguably, be explained as a result of recent changes to school management in England. Whilst working with the under performing teacher has always been an expectation of headteachers, it is only within the last few years that the accountability processes present within the state system have begun to demand a prompt and efficient response to the improvement of sub-standard performance from an individual teacher. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that so many headteachers felt less than well prepared in this respect. Similarly, the use of information technology as a management tool, especially in regard to the analysis of student data, is a new phenomenon for most headteachers and particularly those who have been in post for more than 11 years at the time of the

survey. The 1988 Education Reform Act brought with it the responsibility to manage the vast bulk of the budget at the site level, a responsibility that had previously been with the LEA. Using computer technology for that reason was not an essential part of the headteacher role until the effects of the legislation began to bite. More recently the demand for compulsory target-setting has brought with it an urgent need for headteachers to become capable of student data analysis and interpretation, a skill that was not a major requirement for the vast majority of this sample when they were appointed.

Hence the surprise to find that an element of headship that has always been an essential element of the post, the ability to understand and apply the law to specific situations, has so few headteachers perceiving themselves to be ready for that aspect of the role in their first year of service. Further analysis of the data planned (see below) may shed more light on this outcome, as may additional follow up research. At this stage it is only possible to speculate that this perceived lack of skill maybe due to the lack of experience of aspirant headteachers in dealing with legal issues on behalf of the school. The qualitative data extracted from the open ended questions in Part 3 points out the lack of opportunity, particularly in primary schools, for deputy headteachers and other senior staff to engage in management and leadership behaviour as they have too little non-teaching time available to them. This factor has also been confirmed in other empirical research (Shipton and Male, 1998). It may also be that aspirant headteachers do not understand or appreciate the full importance and responsibility of the role until they actually occupy the position of headteacher (Daresh and Male, 2000). The likelihood is that the recognition of ultimate responsibility resident in the headship is the only time when the need to apply the law to specific situations becomes a necessity.

Further analysis of the data is now being undertaken to investigate differences in response levels between headteachers according to:

- types of schools within the population sample;
- age of respondents;
- gender of respondents;
- length of service, and;
- various combinations of the above.

Results of this analysis will be reported in subsequent papers and publications. It is anticipated that differences between groups will account for some of the remaining under prepared skills. Initial analysis of the data by school type shows the bulk of respondents (see Table 4, below) to be from primary schools, a weighting that will skew the data in their favour and can already be demonstrated as being responsible for the fact that fewer than half the respondents felt less than well prepared to plan for future needs and growth. Headteachers from all other categories of schools saw this skill as a strength. This initial analysis similarly demonstrated that of the seven skills identified by all respondents as ones for which they felt less than well prepared, only four continue to hold that status across all strata of schools:

- working with the under performing teacher;
- using student performance data to plan curriculum;
- the application of law to specific situations;
- using information technology and other tools in the management process.

Table 4: Breakdown of National Headteacher Survey

Type of School	Surveyed	Responses	Percentage
Nursery	57	35	61
Primary	1785	1100	62
Secondary	295	176	60
Special	148	94	63
Overall	**2285**	**1405**	**62**

The impact of training on the perceived state of readiness is shown to be consistently low across all aspects of skill development, formation of attitudes and values and increase of knowledge. Deeper analysis of the data will be able in due course to identify the type of training undertaken by respondents in terms of higher degree programmes, professional development courses and specific headship training (including NPQH for some respondents). It is worth noting that the combination of training and experience was the principal factor cited by respondents in increasing knowledge relevant to the post of headteacher, an outcome that corresponds to earlier work in the field (e.g. Daresh and Male, 2000).

The findings from this study should be of interest to the National College for School Leadership, due to take on the responsibility for headship preparation in England in September of this year. Caution needs to be expressed at this stage, however, that over simplistic interpretation of the findings could be damaging. It is likely that the Teacher Training Agency, responsible for the introduction of the NPQH in 1997, will interpret the finding that training provision prior to their involvement having seemingly had such little impact on practice as justification for arguments that the NPQH content and process were entirely appropriate. NPQH at that time was based on the principle that school based practical experience was of greater value than the theory based approach typically offered in higher degree programmes or, even, in other off-site provision. NPQH was initially offered as a uniform experience to aspirant headteachers irrespective of size/type of school, or other differential factors between candidates for the award (although some candidates are now allowed to 'fast track' through the programme if they significant and relevant prior learning and experience). First line analysis of different groups amongst the responses in this survey suggests that there may be differences in their development needs. The breakdown of skills into two categories entitled 'technical' and 'personal', for example, shows differences between men and women in their perceived state of readiness which, if demonstrated to be at the significant level, could provide evidence for a differentiated programme in the NPQH. The National College for School Leadership, due to be responsible for NPQH in the future and having already undertaken a review of the content and process, would be advised to be cautious of the global findings from this study until the next level of data analysis is complete.

CODA

Deeper analysis of the data is being commissioned at the time of writing this paper, with the results becoming available throughout the rest of this year (and probably beyond). Readers are encouraged to keep in touch with the authors (correspondence details on cover page). A range of papers and publications is planned and will be available on request where copyright allows.

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